

# Movie Review: 'Ricki and the Flash'

**By Maria Macina**

*Catholic News Service*

NEW YORK - Not even the storied talent of Meryl Streep can hold together the scattershot elements of the character study "Ricki and the Flash" (TriStar).

Despite the perennial Oscar nominee's presence, director Jonathan Demme's film veers disconcertingly between drama and romantic comedy. It also shifts unconvincingly from a realistic view of moral shortcomings to the illusion of simplistic solutions.

Streep plays Ricki Randazzo, a 60-something failed rock star and current bar-band front woman. Ricki, whose real name is Linda Brummell, long ago abandoned her family to pursue her musical ambitions.

Ricki spends her days working at the check-out register of an organic food mart. Constantly broke, she's also a commitment-phobe who keeps her very likeable band mate and live-in boyfriend, Greg (Rick Springfield), at arm's length.

Though she seems content enough with her honky-tonk existence, Ricki is forced to confront the legacy of her own selfishness when her sympathetic ex-husband, Pete (Kevin Kline), summons her beck from L.A. to Indiana to help him cope with a family emergency.

Their daughter, Julie - portrayed by Streep's real-life daughter, Mamie Gummer - has been thrown into a downward emotional spiral by the sudden desertion of her hubby, Max (Gabriel Ebert), who has thrown her over for another woman. Along with Julie's difficulties, Ricki faces the enduring hostility of her two sons, Josh (Sebastian Stan) and Adam (Nick Westrate), as well as the no-nonsense truth telling of Pete's second wife, Maureen (Audra McDonald).

While Springfield turns in a strong performance as Ricki's ethical anchor, Streep feels uncomfortable in the character's skin and is never really believable as a rocker.

Diablo Cody's disconnected script, moreover, fails to set. Instead, the geographically disparate parts of Ricki's story feel like two largely unrelated narratives unfolding in a single movie.

The musical performances do serve to advance the plot in a few instances. But they more often come across as extraneous.

The screenplay takes an interesting approach with Ricki, making her a leather-wearing, free-spirited hippie who also holds at least some of the convictions of a conservative Republican. Thus she openly expresses her dislike of President Barack Obama and her admiration for the U.S. military. (Ricki's brother, we learn, was killed in the Vietnam War.) Ricki also shows her discomfort with Adam's homosexual lifestyle.

What degree of sympathy are we meant to feel for these opinions? As with the treatment of Ricki's fundamental choice to forsake domestic life in favor of her dreams of musical greatness, the exploration is shallow and the evidence ambiguous.

In dealing with that central topic, Cody is unsparing in her portrayal of the long-lasting damage caused by Ricki's disappearing act. Yet, not only do Greg's dogged affections offer her fresh hope, viewers are also left with the distinct - and unsatisfying - impression that all the ruinous destruction Ricki left behind can ultimately be cleaned up with good intentions and a well-chosen song.

The film contains cohabitation, a nongraphic premarital bedroom scene, benignly viewed drug use, mature themes, including homosexuality, at least one use of profanity and several crude and crass terms. The Catholic News Service classification is A-III - adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 - parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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